

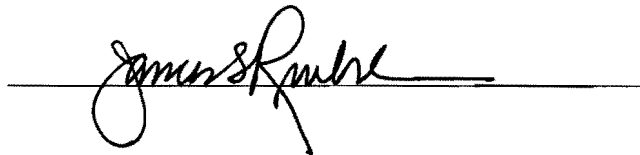
Caesar or *Rex*?

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James S. Ruebel", is written over a solid horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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Abstract

In the last two years of his life Julius Caesar held absolute power in Rome and he was a monarch in everything except name. Was this, however, his objective since the beginning of his political career? Some authors, both modern and ancient have contended that Caesar always had a desire for absolute power and he always worked toward achieving that singular goal. His ancient biographers, such as Suetonius and Plutarch, reported omens and miracles that occurred upon his birth and they make repeated references to Caesar's life-long lust for power. This view is inaccurate and Caesar's goals, like those of most other people, changed over time, and he couldn't have hoped to achieve a monarchy until about 46 B.C. I will give an analysis of some of the major events in Caesar's life, discussing what his motivations were for each major action he took.

Introduction

It is written in Plutarch's biography of Caesar that, upon coming across a squalid, poor barbarian village, Caesar's friends jokingly wondered whether there was heated contention for offices and strife amongst the nobles in that town. Caesar quite seriously replied, "I would rather be first here than second at Rome."¹ Ancient texts are full of stories and remarks like this about Caesar, referring to his supposed insatiable lust for power. Most ancient authors, and even some modern classicists, assume that Caesar was out to attain absolute power from the very beginning of his life, but these people are matching the evidence of his last years to his earlier years. Caesar certainly hoped to be politically powerful in Rome and reach the consulship, but he couldn't have hoped to attain absolute power in Rome until about 49 B.C. It could be said, however, that Caesar recognized early on that the Optimate² oligarchy was no longer sufficient to govern Rome's expanding Empire.³ Heavy corruption and mismanagement of provinces was taking its toll on Rome. There was growing strife among the urban mob. The Roman nobility knew all of the problems that their empire faced, but they were not taking effective measures to solve them. Caesar knew that a serious change in government was needed to solve these problems. Most politicians of the Late Republic concentrated on events in Rome, while Caesar had a more global view.⁴ His views and his way of thinking, both politically and religiously, were remarkably ahead of his time.

¹ Plutarch. *Caes.* 11, 3-4.

² The political party of conservative oligarchs who supported the power of the Senate.

³ Matthias Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman* (Harvard University Press, 1968) 272. Gelzer addresses this argument extensively in this book, citing the ineptness of the oligarchy as the cause of the Civil War.

⁴ Gelzer, 273.

This paper will examine Caesar's life and attempt to change the misconception that Caesar had a long term goal of monarchy and that he always worked toward attaining that goal. Caesar only seriously thought about seizing absolute power when it was his for the taking following the Civil War. He was not so much pro-monarchy as he was anti-oligarchy, since Rome's current system of government was inadequate for running an empire. There is evidence that he wanted the title of king, but probably not earlier than 45 B.C., and he wanted to have the title forced on him by the Senate and people. This paper will also seek to prove that most of Caesar's actions were not part of a master plan for world domination, but reactions to the events, problems, and values of his time and place. I will begin with a section that will contain a brief account of Caesar's early life and the family connections with which he grew up, then moving on to discuss his political actions and motives through 60 B.C. The next section will cover Caesar's consulship, discussing the Triumvirate⁵ and his agenda as consul. The Civil War with Pompey will be discussed in some detail, including the causes of the war, Caesar's conduct during the war, and events in Rome during the war. The aftermath of the Civil War up until the time of Caesar's death, including Caesar's actions during his dictatorship will be discussed, with emphasis on his method of government as well as the legislation and reforms that he put into place before his death. Also discussed in this section will be the honors, both political and religious, that Caesar received from the Senate in the last years of his life. The question of whether or not Caesar wished to establish a Hellenistic Monarchy in imitation of Alexander will also be given some attention.

⁵ The triumvirate between Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus was not an officially recognized body, but rather a private coalition designed to increase and maintain their own political power.

Early Life and Political Career

Gaius Julius Caesar was born on July 13, 100 B.C. to a well-to-do patrician family. He was an only child, but his childhood was not overly extravagant. His education was not dissimilar from that of other young nobles. He learned well his Latin and Greek grammar, as well as history, literature, and oratory. The Julii were one of the oldest patrician families, claiming they could trace their descent all the way back to Aeneas, but the family had gained little notoriety in the political world. Caesar's father never reached the consulship, advancing only as far as the praetorship in Rome and a proconsulship in Asia. The most important family notoriety that Caesar enjoyed came from his relationship to Gaius Marius, one of the most celebrated Roman generals and the husband of Caesar's paternal aunt. At age 13, after Marius and Cinna seized power in Rome, Caesar first began to enjoy the fruits of this family connection, as he was chosen to hold the office of *flamen Dialis*, one of the most distinguished priesthoods⁶ in Rome. Caesar, however, was not old enough to be officially inaugurated, so the office remained vacant and Caesar appears to have stayed quiet throughout the civil war that ensued during his teenage years. During this time Caesar took his first wife, Cornelia, the daughter of Cinna. This marriage was arranged for religious and political reasons, since the *flamen Dialis* had to be married to a patrician. Marriage ties would later play a large part in Caesar's life, as will be discussed later.

Even though being the *flamen Dialis* was a high religious honor, it was a very demanding position that would have made any future political or military career for Caesar impossible, as the *flamen Dialis* was not allowed to hold political office, see

⁶ The office of *flamen Dialis* had many limitations, but it was still a distinguished priesthood because of the large role that religion played in the lives of most Romans.

armed troops, or spend more than two consecutive nights outside of Rome. Caesar wasn't even interested in the office at such a young age, but he wasn't in a position to refuse the favors of such powerful men. Luckily for Caesar, he never had to assume the priesthood⁷, since Sulla marched into Rome and declared all appointments of Marius and Cinna invalid. Sulla also demanded that Caesar divorce his wife, since she was the daughter of Sulla's hated rival. But Caesar, now 18 and no longer a boy, showed the audacity and courage that he later became famous for and refused to obey Sulla. If nothing else, this action shows Caesar's unwillingness to play "follow the leader." Considering the fact that Caesar was given the opportunity to divorce Cornelia instead of just being proscribed and killed, some family members (his mother had considerable family connections, as she was related to the Aurelius Cottas) had to have recommended him to Sulla and, had he acquiesced to Sulla, he would have played some part in Sulla's government. This refusal, however, forced Caesar to leave Rome for fear of his life, being saved from death only when several of his friends and relatives appealed to Sulla on his behalf.

After leaving Rome, Caesar went off to the East to begin his military training, serving in Asia under the propraetor Marcus Minucius Thermus. By all accounts, Caesar turned out to be an excellent soldier; according to Suetonius he was even awarded the *corona civica* for bravery.⁸ Caesar kept abreast of political events in Rome; when he heard of Sulla's death, he returned to Rome. Suetonius writes that Caesar had learned of plans for a revolution under the consul Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and, even though he

⁷ L.R. Taylor, "The Rise of Julius Caesar," *Greece & Rome 2nd Series* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Mar. 1957) pp. 10-18. In this article Taylor suggests that Caesar was not inaugurated because the *Pontifex Maximus*, who was later killed by the Marians, refused to carry out the ceremony.

⁸ Suetonius, *Caes.* 2.

was encouraged to join the attempted coup he did not take part in it. The revolution eventually failed and Caesar, because he had refused the invitation, emerged from the event unscathed.⁹ Although his refusal to take part in this insurrection does not in itself disprove that Caesar had a life-long desire for revolution, it does show that Caesar was much too smart to take such a political gamble before his career had even begun. Caesar refused to take part in the attempted revolution because, if he was going to hold political power, he wanted to gain power in Rome through constitutional means so that he could remain unassailable by his political opponents. During the course of his political career Caesar proved to be a master at making his foes appear to be in the wrong, while making himself appear just and reasonable.

Caesar remained in Rome for the next couple of years and gained some notoriety for bringing two extortion cases on behalf of his Greek clients against two nobles who had plundered provinces in the East. The first case was brought against Gnaeus Cornelius Dolabella and ended in acquittal. The next case was brought against Gaius Antonius. Caesar was so persuasive that Antonius went to the tribunes and received protection from them so that he could not be indicted. Even though neither of these cases ended in convictions, some of Caesar's speeches were published and they gained him a reputation as an excellent orator.¹⁰ According to the ancient sources, Caesar brought these cases against these magistrates on his own initiative, so we know that Caesar was not acting under orders from powerful enemies of these men. Caesar saw that corrupt mismanagement of the provinces had become a major problem and he moved to do

⁹ Suet. *Caes.* 3.

¹⁰ Plutarch, *Caes.* 3, 2.

something about it. In this case he did not set out solely to gain notoriety, but he was instead reacting to a particular problem of his time and place.

Caesar left Rome for Rhodes in 75 B.C. and was captured by pirates en route. The pirates demanded a ransom for Caesar, which was summarily paid, and he was later set free. As soon as he was set free Caesar mustered a force and pursued the pirates, again quite on his own initiative and without any governmental authority. Caesar captured the pirates and brought them to Asia Minor for execution, meeting with the governor of the province about the matter. The governor, however, did not give the order for their execution, so Caesar went back and gave the order himself.¹¹ Gelzer writes, “This is evidence of his limitless audacity and self-confidence,”¹² but it shows more than that. It again shows Caesar’s willingness to take a problem into his own hands. Pirate activity had become a serious problem for the Republic by this time. The Senate had actually moved to combat this problem in the early 70’s B.C., but the governors in the East became concerned with other wars and did not devote as much attention to the pirate problem. This event also shows the lengths to which he would go in order to defend his *dignitas*.¹³ Caesar himself wrote in his *Bellum Civile*, “For [Caesar], *dignitas* had always come first: he valued it more highly than his life.”¹⁴ He certainly would have found a kidnapping to be a gross assault on his *dignitas*. Caesar had the pirates crucified, just as he had promised them, but he ordered that their throats be cut before they were put on the crosses. This action serves to show Caesar’s reaction to the values of his time, namely the notion of *dignitas*. An assault on the honor of a noble Roman was not something to

¹¹ Suetonius, *Caes.* 4, 2.

¹² Gelzer, 24.

¹³ *Dignitas* is the respect and honor that a Roman would earn throughout his lifetime.

¹⁴ Caesar, *Bellum Civile*, 1, 9, 2.

be taken lightly, and it would not have been uncommon for men to be killed for such an offense.

After the incident with the pirates, Suetonius writes of Caesar's first real action as a military commander. In 74 Mithridates' forces had invaded Asia in opposition to the Romans. Upon hearing of this, Caesar crossed into Asia, took command of the local auxiliary troops, and drove out the forces of Mithridates.¹⁵ It is not clear whether Caesar gained any widespread notoriety for this action, but it certainly shows his self-confidence and devotion to his country. Caesar was still a young man with very little military experience, but he had enough confidence to lead an inexperienced militia against enemy soldiers. Suetonius is the only author who makes mention of this incident, thus not much is known about it, but it appears that this command was short-lived and did not draw much attention in Rome.

Caesar spent time in the East until the death of his cousin, Gaius Cotta, after which he returned to Rome to begin his political career. Cotta had been a member of the College of Pontiffs, and Caesar had been nominated to take his place. It was quite an honor for Caesar, who was only 26, to join the pontifical college, which was composed of such old and distinguished members. His mother Aurelia had considerable political connections (Gaius Cotta was one of her cousins) and she likely had something to do with his nomination.¹⁶ Not long after Caesar became a pontiff, he was nominated for a military tribuneship for the year 72. There is not much information about Caesar's activity as a military tribune; it wasn't a very distinguished office,¹⁷ but it is worth mentioning because it was the first office to which he was elected by the people. Caesar

¹⁵ Suetonius, *Caes.* 4, 2.

¹⁶ Gelzer, 25.

¹⁷ The military tribuneship was an undistinguished position that young nobles held as a matter of tradition.

was not very visible in the political arena over the next few years during which he became more known for his lavish spending and extravagant lifestyle than anything else.¹⁸ There was a public meeting in about 73 at which Caesar spoke in favor of a bill that would allow for the return of those that were exiled after Lepidus' failed coup following the death of Sulla. The speech was apparently very good and was later published. In the speech Caesar claimed that he was in favor of the bill because his brother-in-law was one of the exiles, and he felt it his duty to help him. This was a good moment for Caesar in that he got a chance to display his considerable oratorical skills to the people and he gained the favor of a tribune of the people. Also, he gained the favor of the *populus* for this display of familial piety. Other than this, nothing more is known about Caesar's activities from about 73-70.

Caesar appears to have emerged from his period of apparent inactivity¹⁹ in about 69, when he was elected to the quaestorship in Further Spain, which was doubly important because it also gave him membership in the Senate. Caesar was kept busy during his time as quaestor, being placed in charge of collecting taxes and administering justice, among other things. Not much is known about the way Caesar conducted his quaestorship in Spain, but judging from the way that he was treated by the Spaniards when he waged the Civil War there, he must have treated them fairly and done a good job. According to ancient sources, Caesar wasn't very fond of the post and left for Rome before his term of office was officially over. He found the office tedious and insufficiently rewarding. On his way back to Rome Caesar made a bold, and dangerous,

¹⁸ Gelzer, 30.

¹⁹ While there is no proof that Caesar was inactive during this time, it is certain that if he had done anything noteworthy during this period it would have been reported in Suetonius or Plutarch. It is also important to note that Caesar had just become eligible for political office at this time, so it is not surprising that we do not know much about his activities before this time.

move when he passed through Transpadane Gaul. There was great unrest among the peoples there because, even though they had been Romanized, they had not been given citizenship: This privilege was only for residents living south of the Po. Gelzer writes, “Accordingly unrest was rife, and Caesar, entirely in the spirit of the old *populares*, hurried to seize this opportunity, visited the communities and hoped for an armed uprising.”²⁰ This was only averted because two legions destined for Cilicia were held in Northern Italy until the trouble passed.²¹ This move was uncharacteristic of Caesar, and the incident was later exaggerated by his opponents.²² Caesar was trying to build a strong base of support among the Transpadanes in the event that they would one day become useful. Caesar and Crassus wanted the Transpadanes to gain citizenship because they would be useful tools for swaying elections if they were given the right to vote, since they would vote for those who lobbied for their citizenship. Upon his return to Rome, Caesar and Crassus pushed for a bill that would grant citizenship to the Transpadanes. Crassus, who was censor in that year, tried to help pass the bill but his Optimate colleague, Catulus, opposed the bill and it was never passed.²³ This incident shows Caesar’s tendency to see Rome in a more global sense and to view all people under Rome’s dominion as Roman citizens.

When Caesar returned to Rome his career began to look brighter. He immediately tried to gain the ear of Pompey, the most powerful man in Rome at the time. In the years

²⁰ Gelzer, 32.

²¹ Suet. *Caes.* 8.

²² T. Rice Holmes, *The Roman Republic and the Founder of the Empire*, Vol. 1 (Russell & Russell, New York, 1967) 225. Holmes writes that Caesar would have been “devoid of common sense” to incite rebellion.

²³ Holmes, 237. This was a complex matter and Holmes does a good job of explaining it. The dispute between Crassus and Catulus became so bitter that both resigned as censors. A measure that forced all resident aliens in Rome to leave was passed after the resignation of Crassus and Catulus, thus spoiling Caesar and Crassus’ hope that the Transpadanes would become part of their clientele in time for the next election.

67 and 66 Caesar supported two bills that were opposed by the Optimates, but embraced by the people. These two bills proposed to give Pompey supreme commands, one against the pirates in 67 and the other against Mithridates in 66. The Optimates were opposed to these bills, since supreme command could lead to a dictatorship that would destroy their oligarchy. In this case Caesar's audacity paid off: the bills were passed, the people were happy with him, and most importantly, Pompey was happy with him. The next magistracy that Caesar held was the curule aedileship with his colleague being Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus.²⁴ As aedile, Caesar was placed in charge of the maintenance of all public places, including buildings, temples, streets, and plazas. According to Suetonius, what Caesar really became known for during his aedileship was the magnificence of his games,²⁵ for which the aediles were responsible during their term. During his aedileship Caesar was successful in gaining a broad base of support among the common people. In the latter half of the year, Caesar attempted to use this support, along with the help of Crassus, to gain an extremely lucrative command in Egypt, for the purpose of making it a Roman province.²⁶ Caesar and Crassus were working in conjunction for mutual benefit. Caesar wanted to gain notoriety as a military commander and Crassus wanted to have leverage over Pompey. Control of Egypt's corn supply and the Roman army that would be sent there to enforce the annexation would have certainly provided Crassus the leverage that he wanted. This attempt failed, but Caesar and Crassus later tried to gain control over Egypt indirectly through an agrarian law proposed by Publius Vibullius

²⁴ Caesar's relationship with Bibulus will be discussed in more detail in the section concerning their consulship.

²⁵ Suet. *Caes.* 10, 1.

²⁶ H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome 133 BC to AD 68*, 5th edition (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1959) 106. There was an alleged will of King Ptolemy X or XI that bequeathed Egypt to Rome. Crassus had a tribune propose the annexation of Egypt. Caesar unsuccessfully lobbied for the provincial command.

Rullus,²⁷ but this attempt was also blocked by Optimate resistance, led by the consul Cicero.

Since his return from Spain Caesar seemed determined to gain political notoriety, and one way to gain success in Rome, both politically and economically, was to lead a successful military campaign. Also, Caesar knew the importance of the provinces and he also knew that mismanagement of one as lucrative as Egypt would be dangerous; hence, he desired to take control of it himself. A bill concerning this matter was introduced in the Senate, but all hope was lost when Cicero stood and gave a successful speech in opposition of the bill. This, however, was a mere setback for Caesar, and in the second half of the year 63 Caesar introduced himself as a candidate for the vacant office of *Pontifex Maximus*.

This also was an audacious move on Caesar's part. This was the highest priesthood in Rome, and was usually reserved for old, venerable politicians with a long history of success in the military and the Senate. Caesar was only thirty-six, had not been a member of the Senate for even a decade, and his experience as a military commander was nearly non-existent. Caesar, however, acted brilliantly in his bid for this office. Before Sulla had it repealed, there had been a law, the *lex Domitia*, which allowed the *Pontifex Maximus* to be elected by the people. Sulla had placed this responsibility in the hands of the College of Pontiffs. Caesar knew that if the College of Pontiffs appointed the *Pontifex Maximus* one of the older, more distinguished candidates would be appointed to the post; hence, he persuaded a tribune, Titus Labienus, to reintroduce the

²⁷ Holmes, 242-243; Gelzer, 42-43. According to the proposed law, a commission of ten would be appointed to oversee the settlement of the urban proletariat in Rome. This commission could also oversee the annexation of further territories.

lex Domitia.²⁸ The law was reenacted and Caesar, through gross bribery, was elected *Pontifex Maximus*.²⁹

The next episode in Caesar's political career that deserves mention is his involvement in the Catilinarian conspiracy. Although Caesar was implicated in the plot,³⁰ Caesar would not have risked everything by throwing himself wholeheartedly into the enterprise, judging from his refusal to join Lepidus' attempted coup years earlier. At best, Caesar sympathized with Catiline but he was waiting to see how things would turn out. It is important to note that Caesar was not the only one who spoke in favor of Catiline, but he was certainly the boldest. He may have spoken against Cicero because he wanted to get revenge on Cicero for ruining his Egyptian command a few years earlier.

Caesar's election to the praetorship for 62 also caused turmoil during that year. He continued his support of Pompey by supporting a bill of Metellus Nepos that would allow Pompey to stand for the consulship *in absentia*. The Optimates were in fierce opposition to this and Cato, as tribune, exercised his veto on the day of the vote. Caesar and Metellus had brought a mob with them to the Forum and they attacked Cato, who only escaped with the aid of the consul Murena. For this act of violence the Senate immediately stripped Caesar and Metellus of their praetorian powers. After trying to defend his actions in a speech, Caesar obeyed the Senate and retired to his home. Two days later a mob formed at his house and prepared to march to the Senate to demand Caesar's reinstatement. Instead of trying to use force against the Senate, as he did with Cato, Caesar wisely decided to calm the crowd and send them back to their homes. For

²⁸ Holmes, 242; Scullard, 108.

²⁹ Suet. *Caes.* 13.

³⁰ Suet. *Caes.* 17.

this Caesar received thanks from the Senate and was reinstated as praetor.³¹ Later in the year the *Bona Dea* scandal took place and the spotlight was uncomfortably on Caesar for a while, because such an act of impiety had taken place in the home of the *Pontifex Maximus*. Caesar was directly involved in the incident, because the scandal took place in his home and his wife had been suspected of adultery; hence, he was in an embarrassing position because of the whole situation, divorcing his wife because of it. He wanted to get out of Rome to escape the unwanted attention.

In June of 61 Caesar left for Further Spain as soon as he was appointed for a propraetorship there. Caesar's hope was to get away from Rome for a while, because of his sizeable debts and the recent scandal. He also wished to gain some notoriety and wealth by campaigning in Spain so that he would be a contender for the consulship on his return. Caesar's creditors, however, would not allow him to leave and it was only through the intervention of Crassus, who was able to satisfy the creditors, that Caesar was able to leave.³²

Caesar enjoyed his first great military success in Spain. As soon as he arrived he levied extra troops and set to dealing with thieves that had been plaguing the province. Caesar dealt with the thieves speedily and was hailed as *Imperator*³³ by his army. Caesar made a fortune from booty in Spain and, according to Suetonius, some accused him of plundering the province.³⁴ Even though Caesar was in dire financial straits, I conclude that he was not unjust in the province for three reasons. First, if he had plundered the

³¹ Suet. *Caes.* 16.

³² Suet. *Caes.* 18, 1; Plut. *Caes.* 11, 1-3.

³³ When a great victory was won for Rome with little cost in Roman lives, the victorious soldiers would hail their commander as *Imperator*, which was the highest praise that a commander could receive from his troops.

³⁴ Suet. *Caes.* 54, 1.

province, the Optimates would most certainly have prosecuted him for extortion. Second, Caesar still enjoyed a fair amount of popularity among the Spaniards when he waged the Civil War there 13 years later. Third, Caesar was opposed to corrupt mismanagement of provinces as is seen in his early extortion cases against Dolabella and Antonius and the measures that he enacted later during his dictatorship. Also, Caesar's civil administration of the province shows that he did not treat the Spaniards unjustly. Caesar eased the suffering of the Spaniards by removing some of their debt to Rome from the war with Sertorius; he issued a law that cancelled debts, but gave creditors the right to two-thirds of the debtor's property. He knew that provinces were useless to Rome unless they were populated with happy and productive citizens. Caesar was so successful in Spain that the Senate granted him a triumph³⁵, and he returned to Rome in 60 with high hopes for a consulship the following year.

The Consulship

Caesar returned to Rome from Spain in June of 60 B.C. to stand for the consulship of 59, the first year he was eligible for the office. Caesar knew that he was certain to be elected to the office for several reasons. First, he had spent the past few years building a strong base of support among the people as a *popularis*³⁶. Second, he finally had a strong record as a military commander and had been awarded a triumph. Third, he was already *Pontifex Maximus*, and that office carried with it a great amount of respect among the common people, who took religion very seriously. Fourth, he was a

³⁵ A triumph was a procession in which the victorious general and his troops paraded through the city to the Capitol while displaying their booty from the war.

³⁶ A *popularis* was a politician who achieved his political goals by catering to the *populus*.

patrician with a long political pedigree. According to law, however, a *triumphator*³⁷ could not cross the *pomerium*³⁸ before his triumph, but a person had to be in the city to run for the consulship. Caesar appealed to the Senate for permission to stand for the consulship *in absentia*, but Cato delivered one of his famous filibusters and spoiled Caesar's plan.³⁹ Caesar now had a difficult decision to make. He either had to give up his triumph or his consulship. Caesar chose to give up the triumph. While certainly a triumph was a high honor, he was only thirty-nine and he knew there would be other opportunities for triumphs if he held the consulship, as consulars were given lucrative military commands after their terms. If he took the triumph he ran a greater risk of not reaching the consulship. Much could happen in a year. He was riding a wave of popularity from his military actions in Spain, but if the Optimates were successful in destroying his reputation then his chances for a consulship in 58 would be gone. From what we know of Caesar and the way he felt about his *dignitas*, reaching the consulship in his first year of eligibility was probably the most important thing for him. Caesar entered the city and was easily elected to the consulship, his colleague being Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus.⁴⁰

Now we must turn our attention to the formation of the so-called First Triumvirate.⁴¹ According to Walter, "The agreement to which the historians...refer as

³⁷ A *triumphator* was a commander who had been awarded a triumph.

³⁸ The *pomerium* was the official sacred boundary of the city.

³⁹ Suet. *Caes.* 18, 2; Plut. *Caes.* 13, 1-2.

⁴⁰ The relationship between Caesar and Bibulus goes back to the year of their aedileship. Bibulus was eligible for the same offices in the same years that Caesar was, so they ended up being colleagues as aedile, praetor, and consul. Bibulus developed a great enmity for Caesar because Caesar overshadowed him every time they were in office together.

⁴¹ The First Triumvirate was not an official, constitutionally recognized body, but a secret alliance made between Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar for the purpose of controlling the Roman government.

the *first triumvirate* is closely connected with Caesar's election to the consulship."⁴²

There is a great deal of confusion as to whether or not the triumvirate was formed before or after Caesar was elected consul. It was formed before the election, as Caesar gained the consulship because of his support from Crassus and Pompey.⁴³ The Senate was not well disposed toward Caesar and, since they knew Caesar's election was certain, they contributed money to make sure that the other consul that was elected would not cooperate with Caesar.⁴⁴ Caesar, faced with a hostile Senate and an uncooperative colleague, did not have much hope for a productive consulship. His best chance to counteract the Senate was to gain the support of the two most powerful men in Rome. For Caesar, the formation of the triumvirate was more a matter of political survival than a move in his quest for eventual domination. Cassius Dio wrote, "There were two things which created, protected, and increased sovereignties – soldiers and money."⁴⁵ Caesar had neither; Pompey and Crassus had both.

Caesar's agenda as consul was to solve the problems that plagued the Republic as a result of the oligarchic rule. He began his consulship by turning his attention to a problem that he had been concerned with for years, but hadn't been able to solve: the overcrowding of Rome. He pushed for two new agrarian laws that would provide land for Pompey's veterans and idle citizens in Rome living off the dole. Caesar's first agrarian law was not dissimilar from the agrarian laws of Rullus and Flavius in the late 60's, but Caesar excluded the Campanian land in an effort to please the Senate.⁴⁶ Caesar

⁴² Gerard Walter, *Caesar: A Biography* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1952) 102.

⁴³ Walter, 103. Here Walter provides a list of quotes from ancient sources that suggest that the triumvirate was formed before the election.

⁴⁴ Suet. *Caes.* 19, 1.

⁴⁵ Cassius Dio 42, 49, 4.

⁴⁶ Gelzer, 72.

had pushed for agrarian bills before, but he had a much better chance of having this one passed, since he had the full support of Pompey and Crassus. Bibulus and the other Optimates in the Senate did all they could to prevent Caesar's law from being passed.⁴⁷ Bibulus tried to declare all voting days to be holidays, watching the skies constantly for unfavorable omens. Caesar quite clearly showed his disdain for the oligarchy and resorted to acts of violence in order to have the law passed.⁴⁸ Caesar soon pushed for the passage of another agrarian bill that would provide for settlement of the Campanian land. This time only Cato had the courage to speak against the proposal in the Senate, whereupon Caesar had him forcibly removed and the bill was eventually passed in May.⁴⁹

Another measure that Caesar undertook was a reduction of the contracted sum for tax-farming companies in Asia. These companies continually appealed to the Senate for aid, but the proposals never met with any success on account of the opposition of the Optimates. Caesar brought the proposal before the people and he was successful in removing one-third of the debt. This move, however, was probably not made to gain popular support. It was made because Crassus and he had a personal stake in tax-farming companies⁵⁰ and Crassus and he would gain support from the equestrians, who controlled the tax-farming companies.

Another social problem that Caesar tackled as consul was the poor administration of the provinces by the Optimates and the equestrians. Caesar introduced a law, the *lex Iulia repetundarum*, which provided regulations for the management of provinces. The

⁴⁷ The Optimates weren't opposed to the distribution of land, but they were opposed to any bills that Caesar introduced because any citizens who were given land as a result of Caesar's laws would become part of his *clientela*, becoming politically obligated to him.

⁴⁸ This whole situation was quite complex. It is important to note that Bibulus also acted illegally by declaring that there were unfavorable omens and that all voting days would be holidays. For more detailed information on Caesar's consulship see Holmes and Gelzer.

⁴⁹ Suet. *Caes.* 20, 3-4.

⁵⁰ Gelzer, 75.

law clearly defined offenses and it contained a new trial procedure. Not only could the chief magistrates be tried, but also members of their staff could be tried as well. The law also outlined a new procedure for extortion trials, stating that anyone who took bribes in connection with the case could also face trial. Caesar's law was met with general approval in the Senate, and it was so well written that not even Cato objected to it.⁵¹

The measures that Caesar enacted during his consulship were not so important as the way that he conducted his consulship. While Caesar solved many social problems, it is important to note that he did not solve them for purely philanthropic reasons. He never would have lent support to a person or a law that would be detrimental to him. In other words, Caesar worked for the common good just as long as it did him no harm. During the entire year Caesar circumvented the constitution and bypassed the Senate when he felt it was necessary. After Bibulus was attacked by a mob when he tried to prevent the passage of Caesar's first agrarian bill, Bibulus became so upset that he retired to his home for the remainder of the year.⁵² This left Caesar as *de facto* sole consul, and even gave rise to the joke that the people were living under the consulship of Julius and Caesar.⁵³ Caesar conducted his consulship like a monarch, but this was a characteristic reaction to his particular situation. Caesar's consulship gave him his first taste of monarchy and it led him to believe that this system of government could be effectively exercised in Rome. The problems that Caesar addressed during his consulship were real problems that required real solutions, but the Optimates would not allow them to be solved by Caesar.

⁵¹ Cassius Dio, 38, 7, 5.

⁵² Suet. *Caes.* 20,1; Bibulus continued to be active during this time. He and his supporters embarked on a smear campaign directed at Caesar and the secret triumvirate. Bibulus published political pamphlets that contained defamatory remarks about Caesar and was somewhat successful in lessening the popularity of Caesar.

⁵³ Cassius Dio, 38, 8, 2.

Therefore, it was quite necessary for Caesar to conduct himself like an autocrat in order to get anything done. The actions of Caesar's opponents show that his methods, while certainly bold, were employed out of necessity rather than a mad lust for power.

When Caesar brought his agrarian bill before the Senate, he publicly stated that he would change any conditions in the bill that the Senate found unfavorable. The Senate could not find any fault with the bill, other than the fact that it went against tradition, and Cato delivered a filibuster to put off the vote. Caesar brought the bill before a popular assembly without the approval of the Senate, which was within his rights as a consul. At the assembly Caesar again tried to follow protocol and asked Bibulus to comment on the bill, whereby Bibulus told Caesar that he would allow no innovations in his consulship, and he would not allow the law to be passed even if all the people wanted it.⁵⁴ During his consulship Caesar had Cato forcibly removed from the Senate no less than twice. These incidents show that it was impossible for Caesar to act in a constitutional manner and work with his colleague and the Senate, because they made no attempt to meet him halfway on anything. Gelzer makes this point perfectly in his biography of Caesar. He writes, "His measures were concerned with urgent problems and were irreproachable in content.... In fact, the opposition, as represented by Cato, was purely negative and deserved to be ignored."⁵⁵ In short, Caesar was left with a choice of having a consulship completely devoid of any productivity or resorting to tyrannical methods to solve Rome's problems.

⁵⁴ Cassius Dio, 38, 4, 1-3.

⁵⁵ Gelzer, 78.

Caesar's autocratic behavior, however, was not without consequences. His and Pompey's popularity among the people was waning,⁵⁶ and he knew that as soon as his consulship was over he would immediately be called to account for his unconstitutional acts. His whole consulship could be declared invalid. His best chance to avoid prosecution was to become proconsul of a province so that he could still have *imperium* and remain untouchable. He engineered things so that he would gain a proconsulship in Gaul as soon as his consulship was over. He succeeded in gaining the provinces of Cisalpine Gaul, Transalpine Gaul, and Illyricum along with four legions. As predicted, the Senate held a meeting to discuss Caesar's actions, but he left for Gaul before anything was decided upon.

Caesar spent almost a decade in Gaul, conducting campaigns almost constantly. He stayed busy in the winter months by turning to civil administration, but he never ceased to follow events at Rome. He was well aware of the Optimates' efforts to remove him from office before his term was over.

The Civil War

The Civil War was not a result of Caesar's will to dominate Rome, it was a matter of his political survival. In some ways, the Civil War following Caesar's proconsulship was a direct result of the events during Caesar's consulship. The Optimates had never forgotten the insults that they had endured at Caesar's hands and they longed to get even. During the 50's, however, the triumvirate was still functioning and Caesar had Pompey in Rome to look after his interests, making sure that he kept his *imperium* until he was able to stand for the consulship again. This system was working until the late 50's, when the Optimates used Caesar's success in Gaul to drive a wedge between him and Pompey.

⁵⁶ Because of Bibulus' smear campaign, which was mentioned earlier.

Caesar had illegally raised additional legions to complement the four that he had been granted by the state, and he had been so enormously successful in battle that the Optimates had no doubt that Caesar would return to Rome as a second Sulla.⁵⁷ The Optimates “knew that Pompey would suffer no equal,”⁵⁸ and thus they used his pride against him. The Optimates soon gained influence over Pompey and they attempted to take Caesar’s provincial command from him before he could become consul again so that he could be prosecuted.⁵⁹ Caesar had support from tribunes in Rome and they interposed their veto on measures to remove Caesar from his provinces. Caesar attempted to defuse the situation by proposing to the Senate that both he and Pompey surrender their legions and become private citizens on an equal footing. This shows that Caesar, just as during his first consulship, was quite willing to compromise with the Senate and that he had no interest in an armed conflict with Pompey. Pompey was still regarded as the superior general and Caesar was by no means certain that he could achieve victory through force of arms. He had no desire to do so, since he had an almost certain consulship waiting for him when he returned to Rome. Caesar would much rather have reached a diplomatic solution through a consulship, as is seen in his subsequent attempts to come to an agreement with the Optimates.⁶⁰ Caesar states in his *Civil War*, “it was as much the duty of a commander to win by policy as by the sword.”⁶¹ The Senate, however, just as during his consulship, refused to meet Caesar halfway. Caesar saw the actions of Pompey and the Senate as a gross assault on his *dignitas* and this is one of the main things that drove

⁵⁷ Gelzer, 198.

⁵⁸ Caes. *B.C.* 1, 4, 4.

⁵⁹ Caesar, *B.C.* 1, 4, 4.

⁶⁰ Caesar, *B.C.* 1, 10-11, 3. Caesar wanted to compromise because he could not afford to lose any of the popularity that he had gained from his victories in Gaul. If he took a position that the populace perceived to be unreasonable or unconstitutional, then he would lose some of his support.

⁶¹ Caesar, *B. C.* 1, 72. “Praesertim cum non minus esset imperatoribus consilio superare quam gladio.”

him to act in the way that he did. In order to prevent his political demise and to defend his *dignitas* Caesar decided that he must take his army into Italy, even though he would be a public enemy.⁶²

Even at this point, when he had a veteran army at his back, Caesar was not aiming for absolute power in Rome. He was much more concerned with securing Northeast Italy to begin his rapid march down the East coast of Italy. By mid-January Caesar had captured the towns of Ariminum, Ancona, and Arretium. When news of this reached Rome, Pompey and most members of the legitimate government fled the city. Caesar had learned of the government's flight from Rome, so he knew that the city would be in a state of disarray and it could be his for the taking if he were to march on it. Caesar, however, was still interested in reaching a diplomatic solution to the conflict. In late January Caesar sent a dispatch to Pompey with new terms for peace, stating that both men would surrender their armies and retire to Spain, leaving Rome in the hands of the Senate. Pompey's camp, however, refused to meet Caesar's demands, thus prolonging the war. If Caesar had had a life-long lust for power, as some would believe, he would not still have treated for peace when Rome was within his grasp.

Caesar was savvy enough to know his biggest obstacle to monarchic rule: no one trusted him. Caesar's powers of demagoguery were unparalleled, but, after the way he acted during his consulship, and considering his command of loyal and seasoned legions, the Optimates expected him to act no differently than Sulla did. He had to improve his public image in order to hold the power effectively that was his for the taking. About a month after Caesar first treated for peace his forces captured the town of Corfinium. Some high-ranking Pompeians were among the captives, including consulars and his

⁶² Caesar, *B.C.* 1, 7; 1, 22.

bitter enemy Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. Caesar released all of these prisoners without punishment and allowed all the defeated soldiers to join his own army.⁶³ This action had the exact effect that Caesar had intended. Public opinion began to sway in his favor. Caesar followed this up by marching on Pompey in Brundisium in early March. Both of the consuls had already left Brundisium, so Caesar could at least have some hope that he could talk Pompey back to his side, since he would not be under the influence of the other members of his party. Pompey, however, refused to negotiate without the consuls, and he escaped from Caesar's grasp in about mid-May.⁶⁴ Caesar now decided to turn his attention to Pompey's forces in Spain, but he had one stop to make on the way.

Caesar finally came to Rome in early April. He had the tribunes Antony and Cassius call a meeting of the Senate, hoping to rally their support, but he found little among the senators, since the ones that had remained in Rome did so to stay neutral rather than to support Caesar. He also found little enthusiasm among the people. The popularity that his clemency had earned him declined when he threatened violence against a tribune who tried to prevent him from taking money from the public treasury.⁶⁵ This unsuccessful return to Rome shows that Caesar truly was more interested in "winning more by policy than by the sword." There was no army to protect the city and the legitimate leaders of the government had fled before him. Nothing was stopping him from imposing martial law and using his troops to put down any resistance in the city. He knew, however, that tyranny was certainly not the answer to the problems of his time. If he were going to rule, he wanted to rule over willing, loyal subjects. Caesar left for Spain with his popularity in serious jeopardy. He badly needed a major victory.

⁶³ Caesar, *B.C.* 1, 23.

⁶⁴ Caesar, *B.C.* 1, 26.

⁶⁵ Gelzer, 210.

Caesar marched to meet Pompey's forces in Spain and he reached Spain in late June. Pompey's forces surrendered in early August. Caesar was lucky in Spain in that he achieved exactly what he needed to. By achieving such a quick victory over two capable military commanders in Afranius and Petreius he showed all of his doubters in Rome that he was capable of winning the war. He gained more popularity by showing some of his famous mercy on the Pompeian troops, even expanding his ranks by allowing them to join his own legions, and he gained more money for his cause from booty and as tribute from some of the Spanish communities. On his return journey to Rome, Caesar learned that the people had made him dictator in Rome.

It was at this point that Caesar began to prepare for absolute power in Rome. He still had an unsure war to win, but he thought it best to lay proper foundations in the chance that victory should come his way. He finally held a constitutionally legitimate position of power, given to him by the people, and he wisely used this position to consolidate his power in Rome, by having himself elected consul, until he could settle his affairs with Pompey. Caesar spent the next eleven days in Rome attending to governmental matters of immediate importance, setting no long-term plans into action. He held elections, in which he was elected consul with Publius Servilius Isauricus and he filled all priesthoods rendered vacant by those who had left with Pompey. He also held the festival of Jupiter Latiaris, which was the responsibility of the consuls. While the festival does not seem like a matter of immediate importance, religion and government were so closely interconnected that it was a good idea for Caesar to hold the festival. It was imperative for Caesar to be perceived as observing tradition and bringing some measure of stability to the city. Caesar also took measures to keep the economy afloat,

including relieving debt by reducing interest and allowing debtors to offer land in repayment instead of cash. He declared that no one could hold more than 15,000 denarii in cash and he distributed more corn to the people. After the elections, Caesar laid down his dictatorship and left affairs in Rome to his subordinates. Here he appears to be still playing both sides. He arranged things in such a way that if he won the war he could return to Rome and pick up where he left off, and if he lost he could have a chance at a diplomatic solution by arguing that he had maintained a constitutionally legitimate position.

Caesar's repeated attempts at making peace with Pompey in Greece suggest that he was still not whole-heartedly pursuing autocratic rule in Rome. He pursued Pompey across the Adriatic, once again trying to arrange a peace agreement when he caught up with him. Caesar sent Lucius Vibullius Rufus, Pompey's chief engineer, to his camp with the terms: both men were to surrender their armies while judgment was left to the Senate and people. Caesar writes that this was the right time to treat for peace because both men were still on an equal footing, and, should one gain the upper hand, he would not be satisfied with equal terms of peace.⁶⁶ This peace offer came to naught, but Caesar kept trying.⁶⁷ When his and Pompey's forces were camped across from each other on opposite sides of the river Apsus, Caesar writes that he frequently sent an envoy to the riverbank to open peace talks. But any chance for a settlement at this time was broken off when Pompey's men were ordered to launch spears into Caesar's camp, wounding

⁶⁶ Caesar, *B.C.* 3, 10.

⁶⁷ Some authors argue that Caesar was not sincere about these peace offers, but there had to have been some degree of sincerity, since Caesar certainly would have been prepared in the unlikely event that Pompey accepted the offers.

several men.⁶⁸ Even when Caesar was in a favorable position, besieging Pompey, he still tried to affect a peace through Scipio, Pompey's father-in-law. He reasoned that Scipio, being so close to Pompey and having an army of his own, would be much more influential to Pompey than simple messengers. Caesar writes that Scipio was at first receptive to the offer, but he eventually sent his envoy back with a negative answer.⁶⁹ It was not long after this that Caesar suffered defeat at Dyrrachium. Following the defeat Caesar withdrew from the siege and delivered a speech to his troops, encouraging them not to lose heart because of the defeat.⁷⁰ Another pitched battle was fought at Pharsalus, with Caesar emerging victorious. He showed his usual clemency by sparing the lives of all who surrendered, except those whom he had already spared once, and saving their property. The decisive blow having been struck, Caesar now devoted himself to pursuing Pompey.

Caesar made a stop in Asia in his pursuit of Pompey, doing some things there that proved that he now was the ruler of the Roman empire. Upon his victory he gave several communities their independence. When he came to Asia, he saw that the people had been ruthlessly taxed by Scipio and the Roman tax-farming companies. Caesar remedied the situation by forbidding the tax-farming companies to impose tolls, reducing the taxes by one-third, and allowing the Asians to collect the taxes themselves, so that the Roman tax-farmers could not extort more money from the people.⁷¹ These changes were important because they show Caesar beginning to test the boundaries of his power. As consul, he had the legal right to make these decisions, but he did not follow proper

⁶⁸ Caesar, *B.C.* 3, 19.

⁶⁹ Caesar, *B.C.* 3, 57.

⁷⁰ Caesar, *B.C.* 3, 73.

⁷¹ Plut. *Caes.* 48, 1.

procedure, failing to gain approval from the Senate or his consular colleague. This is the first instance where Caesar attempted to test the limits of the power that he recently gained with the defeat of Pompey. It is not surprising that he makes no mention of these measures in his *Civil War*. Here, as in other cases, however, Caesar acted more out of necessity than anything else. After the defeat of the Pompeians, the whole government was in such a state of confusion and disarray that no problems could have been remedied unless one man with power stood up and firmly made decisions. There was no time to seek approval from the Senate. Caesar did not spend much time in Asia, because he received word of Pompey's flight to Egypt and proceeded there with great haste. When he reached Egypt he learned of Pompey's death and, as he spent time in the country, saw what a state of disarray it was in. He took it upon himself to pacify the country and spent several months there⁷², after which he traveled to Asia Minor and quickly defeated King Pharnaces. After Pharnaces' defeat, Caesar resolved some governmental and land issues between the rulers in that area. Caesar had been nominated dictator again not long after he arrived in Egypt, because things in Rome had degenerated and a dictator was needed to calm the situation. As soon as he was able, he returned to Rome.

Caesar finally arrived in Rome in October of 47 to find the city badly racked by civil strife, but his presence in the city was enough to settle things at least for the time being. Again Caesar did not stay in Rome long, less than two months, and while he was there he only dealt with matters of immediate importance. The Civil War was not yet over, as there was still much to be done in Africa and, although Pompey was dead and no one man was in a position to challenge him, he did nothing during his short stay in Rome

⁷² Caesar spent a great deal of time with Cleopatra in Egypt, but, since she is not relevant to the main topic of this paper, she will not be discussed.

to suggest that he was aiming at a kingship. His first task was to smooth out the problems created by Antony's tyrannical behavior, which caused Antony to lose Caesar's favor for the time being.⁷³ Then he proceeded to appoint priests, senators, and magistrates for the years 46 and 45. He also increased the number of praetors and priests. In yet another measure to relieve economic pressure on the citizens he reduced rent in Italy.⁷⁴ The main task that Caesar undertook during his stay in Rome was that of raising money. Caesar knew that he would be facing a formidable force in Africa and he still needed large sums of money to pay his troops. He worked out a problem with a mutinous legion of veterans and then he left for Africa in early December. He defeated the Pompeians in Africa in less than six months, finally putting an end to the Civil War. After settling affairs in Africa, respectively punishing or rewarding communities, Caesar headed back to Rome and finally arrived in late July.

The Aftermath of the Civil War

It was at this time that Caesar began to become more serious about pursuing a monarchy in Rome. Gelzer writes, "Thus Caesar's personal leaning towards monarchy grew ever stronger (after his return to Rome in July 46): it was reinforced by the failure of the optimate oligarchy and the Republican constitution to cope with the problems of empire. Monarchy was then his inevitable and chosen objective."⁷⁵ Upon his return he was granted numerous honors by the Senate. According to Dio he accepted forty days of thanksgiving, the dictatorship for another ten years, a three-year censorship, and the right to nominate magistrates. In the Senate, he was given the right to sit with the consuls and

⁷³ Gelzer, 262.

⁷⁴ Gelzer, 264.

⁷⁵ Gelzer, 278.

speak first on all matters.⁷⁶ He would later have his dictatorship and special censorship extended for life. He was also given the sacrosanctity of a tribune. These powers set Caesar well on the path to becoming a monarch, and they were given to him freely by the Senate. Never before had so many powers been consolidated into one “office”, and it is likely that the Senate gave him these powers because no one expected him to be different from Sulla. Since they thought Caesar was going to seize power whether they liked it or not, they thought it would be better to freely give it to him so they would gain his favor. These honors were inconsequential to Caesar, however, since he would have enacted the legislation that he wanted to pass whether he had those powers or not. In addition to these other honors Caesar was granted four triumphs, over Gaul, Egypt, Pharnaces, and Juba. Caesar took this opportunity to endear himself to the people by providing them splendid entertainment. These triumphs were of such splendor and magnificence that they caused more talk of Caesar’s desire for monarchy. He now had the powers of a monarch and, even though he still publicly claimed that that he would work for reconciliation, there was little hope that he would surrender the powers he had been given.

With his political position as secure as it was going to be, Caesar turned to civil administration. He confronted the same social problems that he had dealt with during his first consulship, and his method of government was not much different from the way he governed during his first consulship in that he enacted the same type of legislation. The only difference was that he was working from a more legitimate position, since the Senate had freely granted him extraordinary powers; therefore, all of his decrees were legal. It is important to note that this is the first time that Caesar showed that he had

⁷⁶ Cassius Dio, 43, 14.

made any short-term plans for Rome. He enacted several pieces of legislation and made several decrees in such a short time that he must have thought about how to solve these problems in advance. His pieces of legislation include: taking an exact census of the city; reducing the amount of citizens on the dole from 320,000 to 150,000, with the remainder being provided for by colonization; reforming the courts; and banning the formation or meeting of any political clubs in order to prevent more political unrest. There were also Caesarian laws that were enacted after his death that provided for the maintenance of public streets, the qualifications of magistrates, and the future holding of the census. He had many more grandiose plans for public works that were not put into action before his death. Caesar's biggest interest, however, was colonization, and this shows more than anything the shift from republic to monarchy. The Roman Republic was a city-state government, with the politicians concentrating solely on Rome, using the provinces only for military notoriety and monetary gain, while treating the provincials as second-class citizens. Caesar's government encompassed the whole empire, granting citizenship to many municipalities that had never enjoyed the franchise and even admitting provincials to the Senate. In fact, Caesar personally visited every province during his dictatorship,⁷⁷ making any changes or improvements in government where necessary.

That Caesar was a *de facto* monarch from 46 B.C. until his death is indisputable, as is seen in some of his more oppressive laws and actions. Caesar certainly did a lot of good during his dictatorship, but he also did some things that were clearly tyrannical and were done in order to suppress any potential rivals and further his own power. He passed a law that said citizens living in Italy could not leave Italy for more than three years at a

⁷⁷ Gelzer, 274.

time except on military service. Owners of large farms were required to have at least a third of their employees be free men; wealthy Romans would certainly have been upset that they could not employ as many slaves as they wanted. He passed another law to suppress the luxury of the wealthy. This law laid down strict instructions about how the wealthy traveled, what they were to eat, and how they were to dress.⁷⁸ Also, a law was passed declaring that *propraetors* could only serve a year in their province and *proconsuls* could serve two. This law was clearly meant to prevent anyone from doing what Caesar himself had done. Also, when Caesar needed the Senate's approval for his laws, he would only tell the most senior members and when he assembled the Senate he would simply inform them of his decisions without calling a vote on the matter. Caesar had succeeded for the time being in controlling the *Optimate* oligarchy by making quick and effective use of the power that had fallen into his hands. The fact that Caesar had the power to control provincial affairs at will, could bypass the Senate on all matters, and could appoint magistrates proves that he had monarchical powers in Rome.

He had the power of a king, but did he actually want to be called *rex*? It is impossible to know the answer to this question for sure, but there is some evidence on the matter, most notably the incident at the *Lupercalia* of 44, when Antony several times offered Caesar a crown, which Caesar repeatedly refused. This was a move planned to gauge the reaction the crowd would have to Caesar as king. It was not favorable. There was another incident, before the *Lupercalia*, where one of Caesar's statues was crowned with a diadem and as he entered the city he was greeted as *Rex* by some bystanders. Two tribunes removed the diadem and had the responsible parties carted off to jail. Caesar became quite angry at this, publicly denouncing the tribunes in the Senate, claiming that

⁷⁸ Suet. *Caes.* 42, 1.

they should be stripped of their powers and exiled. Being called king by the Romans would have gained Caesar nothing politically, since he already had the powers of a king. The title of king would only gain him the hatred of almost all Romans. The only reasonable explanation that can be offered for Caesar's pursuit of the kingship is simple vanity. By most ancient accounts, Caesar was a polite, courteous individual, but he clearly becomes much more egomaniacal in the last years of his life. One good example of this comes during his Spanish triumph in October 45, when the tribune Pontius Aquila refused to rise for Caesar. Caesar proceeded to rail at Aquila, saying, "Why don't you make me give up the state, Aquila? After all, you are a tribune?" For days after that, whenever Caesar made a promise, he scornfully made the remark, "If Pontius Aquila gives me permission."⁷⁹ Another example comes in late 45, when the Senate came to the Temple of Venus Genetrix to inform Caesar of the new honors they had decreed for him. Caesar failed to rise when the Senate approached, showing a great insult to all of the senators. It was stated earlier in this paper that many of Caesar's actions were simply reactions to his time and place rather than steps in a plan for kingship, but that pattern ceased once the Civil War ended. Since Caesar had no enemy with power to rival his own, he stopped making reactions to his enemies' plans and began blithely doing as he pleased.

Now we must turn our attention to some of the religious aspects of Caesar's situation at Rome and the question of Hellenistic Monarchy. Caesar did not intend to establish a Hellenistic Monarchy because it would not have been an effective government for an empire as large as the Romans controlled. Also, Hellenistic Monarchies centered on religion, and Caesar's record shows that he never had much faith in, nor made much

⁷⁹ Plut. *Caes.* 56, 7-9.

of a concerted effort to interfere in, religion. F. E. Adcock writes, “We may, then, attribute to Caesar at Rome no more than a policy of *laissez-faire* in religious matters.”⁸⁰ Although he was *Pontifex Maximus*, he is more recognized as a general and a politician. The closest connection he had with Roman religion was the claim that he was descended from Venus. There is no record of him making any sweeping religious reforms. There are some passages in the ancient biographies of Caesar that show his disdain for haruspicy, which was taken quite seriously by religious Romans, and he never made any effort to interfere with religion in the provinces. In the East, after Pharsalus, the Greeks honored Caesar as a god and he allowed this only because it was their custom to honor their leaders in such a way. There is not any compelling evidence that shows that he wanted to be honored as a god by the Romans. In fact, when he returned to Rome from the Civil War in 45, he had an inscription that referred to him as a demigod removed from a statue. This was the first mention of Caesar’s divinity in public. Caesar was not officially deified until after his death. Stefan Weinstock’s book *Divus Julius* is an excellent source about Caesar’s connection with religion. In this book, he gives a perfect explanation of Caesar’s religious honors, writing, “[Religious honors] became a constitutional necessity from the moment when the real power passed from the annual magistrates to the single and permanent ruler.”⁸¹ He did not necessarily need to be worshipped by his subjects, as a Hellenistic monarch would, but he did have to appear more than human for the Romans to tolerate his rule.

⁸⁰ F. E. Adcock, “Caesar’s Dictatorship,” *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge University Press, 1932).

⁸¹ Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford University Press, London, 1971) 3.

Conclusion

When examining the events of Caesar's life, we see that most of the things he did were reactions to the problems, events, and values of his time and place. Sometimes he was motivated to act in order to defend his *dignitas*, as he claims was the case in the Civil War, other times he was motivated to act because the current government was not solving social problems that needed to be solved. He could not have had any realistic plans for supreme power in Rome before 49 B.C., and, as his repeated attempts at making peace with Pompey show, it was probably not until about 46 B.C. that he pursued a monarchy. In his early life we see that Caesar was somewhat idealistic, despite a rather decadent lifestyle. He demonstrated familial piety and seemed to be genuinely concerned with the plight of his clients in the provinces. He did not seem ambitious until after a quaestorship in Spain in 68 B.C. This is the time when he supposedly wept at the statue of Alexander, and there may be some truth to this story. When he returned to Rome after this quaestorship he did his best to become politically known, and was elected *Pontifex Maximus* not long after his quaestorship. He was later elected curule aedile in 65, becoming quite well known for his lavish games and expenditures, and he served a propraetorship in Spain in the late 60's, returning in time to be elected consul for 59. During his consulship he developed a taste for power and he behaved in an autocratic manner, bypassing his colleague and the Senate in order to pass the legislation that he introduced. Some of his methods during his consulship were unconstitutional, but he was not acting out of a lust for absolute power, he was acting out of necessity. In order to avoid prosecution by the Optimates for his misconduct as consul, Caesar spent the rest of the 50's as proconsul in Gaul, demonstrating his skill as a general. Caesar took his army

into Italy in 49, sparking the Civil War, but his actions show that this was a war that he had no desire to fight, since he had nothing to gain. It was by no means certain that he would win the war, and there was no way to foresee that the legitimate government would flee before him, leaving Rome free for him to control. Caesar, however, did not seize absolute power in Rome at this point, even though he had an army at his back, but he still made repeated attempts at making peace with Pompey. It wasn't until Pompey was dead and the Optimate oligarchy broken that Caesar fully seized absolute power. After the Civil War, Caesar took the powers that the Senate had granted him, using them to render the Senate powerless. Caesar did a lot of good for Rome while he was in power, but he also did some things to abuse his power, which cost him his popularity among the common people. His unpopularity was further amplified by his aspiration to the kingship. The Optimates used this unpopularity to their advantage by killing Caesar and convincing the people that he was killed to liberate the Roman people. Caesar's government, however, provided much needed stability to Rome and its growing empire, and his death sparked more bloody civil strife that ended with his heir assuming a monarchy anyway.

Caesar was ahead of his time in that he accepted the fact that the Roman Republic was an antiquated form of government, good enough to govern a city-state, but inadequate for governing an empire such as the ones the Romans controlled. His efforts to unify the empire are quite clear: he pushed for colonization that provided for thousands of idle Roman citizens while spreading the Roman way of life to different parts of the world; he intervened in the corrupt mismanagement of the provinces, easing the financial burden on the provincials so they would be happier and more productive; he

granted citizenship to many provincials and he even admitted some of their number to the Senate. It is clear from these efforts that Caesar was aiming for a complete reformation of the Roman government, changing the political focus from local to global, but he was killed before he could unveil any long-term plans for the Roman state.

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